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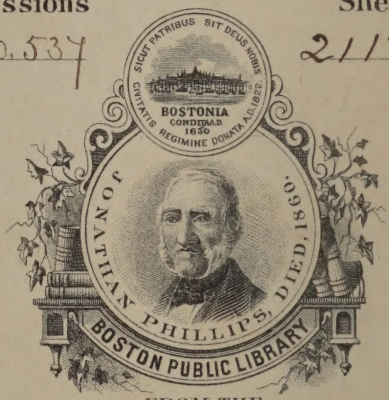

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Who was Scotland's First Printer?

By

Robert Dickson, F.S.A. Scot.

Who was

Scotland's

First Printer?

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Who was Scotland's First Printer?

Ane Compendious and breue Tractate, in Commendation of Androw Myllar.

Compylit be

Robert Dickson,

F.S.A. Scot.

London:
Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill.
1881.

F.W.B.

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TO

WILLIAM BLADES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF

THE BIOGRAPHY AND TYPOGRAPHY

OF

WILLIAM CAXTON,

ENGLAND'S PROTOTYPOGRAPHER.

Who was Scotland's First Printer?

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

WALTER CHEPMAN has hitherto enjoyed even more than the lion's share of the honour attached to the introducers of the art of Printing into Scotland; and so well has he maintained his laurels, that his coadjutor, Androw Myllar, has either received but a trifle of the merit, or been ignored altogether. It may seem a somewhat ungracious proceeding to attempt to detract from the renown which has so long been allowed to adorn Chepman's name; but on the principle of giving every

man his due, we feel that we are doing but ordinary justice to Androw Myllar if we show that he, and not Chepman, is entitled to the high distinction of being designated Scotland's First Printer.

I.

ANTECEDENT KNOWLEDGE.

PRINTING had been exercised in Scotland for nearly three hundred years before it was ascertained at what time or by whom the art was introduced into the country.

The copy of the *Breviarium Aberdonense* presented to the library of the University of Edinburgh in 1635, must have acquainted those versed in the study of books, that the volumes were printed in Edinburgh in 1509 and 1510, at the command and expense of Walter Chepman, merchant in the said city; and, consequently, that there was a printing-press thus early in Scotland. But the existence of this work appears to have been afterwards lost sight of, as Watson, who

published "A History of the Art of Printing," in 1713, was evidently not aware of so early a Scotch-printed book, and, indeed, was otherwise ignorant regarding the establishment of our primitive press.

In 1788 a volume was presented to the Advocates Library, which threw additional light upon our early printed literature. The volume contained eleven separately printed pieces or small quarto books, some of which indicated the printers, place, and date of printing. These pieces proved that in 1508, the year before Walter Chepman printed the first volume of the *Aberdeen Breviary*, he was associated with Androw Myllar in the production of the pieces referred to. The earliest dated piece in the volume has the following colophon :—

"Heir endis the maying and disport of chaucer. Imprentit in the southgait of Edinburgh be Walter chepman and Androw mpllar the fourth day of aprile the yhere of god M.CCCCC. and viii. yheris."

This is the most complete piece in the collection, having, besides the colophon given, the entire text, and a short anonymous poem

at the end; the title over the device of Walter Chepman on the recto of the first leaf, and the device of Androw Myllar on the reverse of the last leaf. The colophons of the other two pieces which possess them, show that they were both printed in April, 1508; and the remaining six pieces, undoubtedly from the same press, may be assigned to the same year. Concerning the two last pieces in the volume we will have some interesting remarks to make.

Herbert was fortunate enough to obtain from George Paton, Edinburgh, a very exact account of the collection in question, so that it found a place in the appendix to the third volume of his great work, in 1790.

George Chalmers, who was already advanced in his typographical researches when Herbert concluded his extensive labours, applied himself with fresh diligence to obtain further information regarding the introduction of printing into Scotland. He was able to go back, by means of the unique volume just referred to, as far as the year 1508; and he believed that by searching the records deposited in the General Register House, Edinburgh, some additional knowledge would be acquired upon the subject. With this hope he solicited his friend,

Mr. William Robertson, one of the functionaries in that establishment, to aid him in his efforts, and that gentleman had the satisfaction of discovering a document which might be said to place the matter at rest. The document was no other than the Patent, or Privilege, granted by James IV to his "lovitis servitouris Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar, burgessis of our burgh of Edinburgh," and "geven under our prive Sel at Edinburgh, the XV day of September, and of our Regne the XXti yer" (1507). It states that these individuals "hes at our instance and request, for our pleasure, the honour and proffit of our Realme and Liegis, takin on thame to furnis and bring hame ane prent, with all stuff belangand tharto, and expert men to use the samyne, for imprenting within our Realme of the bukis of our Lawis, actis of parliament, croniclis, mess bukis, and portuus efter the use of our Realme, with addicions and legendis of Scottis sanctis, now gaderit to be ekit tharto, and al utheris bukis that salbe sene necessar," &c. It is not essential here to refer more particularly to this most important document further than to observe that we are not aware of any other monarch, in the early days of printing, having been so

directly instrumental in introducing the typographic art into his kingdom.

Our knowledge of Walter Chepman extends over more than thirty years of his life, and we know that he was a person of wealth and influence, and stood well in the estimation of his sovereign. Of a highly speculative nature, he was ever ready to embark his capital in any undertaking which promised to prove remunerative; and in the matter of establishing a printing-press, where he was assured of royal and episcopal encouragement, and would have his position fenced about with legal securities, Chepman would not hesitate a moment. Although he was altogether ignorant of the details of printing, yet he was ready to provide somebody whom he could trust with all that concerned the practical direction of the work, and that person was Androw Myllar, whom he arranged to assume as a partner. Of course, Chepman was aware of Myllar's antecedents; but until 1869 this knowledge was concealed from all enquirers. Previous to that year our information regarding Myllar amounted simply to the following bare facts. In March, 1503, he supplied the King with several Latin books, and in December, 1507, fifty shillings were paid by the King's treasurer

"for iij prentit bukis tane fra Andro Myllaris wyf." Then we have the mention of Myllar's name in connection with Chepman's in the King's Privilege, in September, 1507, and in the colophons of the books printed by him and Chepman in 1508. These few particulars were really all we knew concerning Myllar, and from them we could gather that he was either a bookseller, or added the sale of books to whatever occupation he followed. It is evident that he was out of the country in December, 1507, when the "iij prentit bukis were tane fra Androw Myllaris wyf."

II.

M. CLAUDIN'S DISCOVERIES.

IN 1869 a new and important light was thrown upon Myllar by the appearance of the sale catalogue of the books of M. Victor Lazarche, of Tours, which were to be sold in Paris the same year. The catalogue was drawn up by M. A. Claudin, the well-known antiquarian bookseller and learned bibliographer, in Paris, who for a number of years has devoted the greatest attention to the provincial typography of France. He was struck by the singular character of the device, bearing the name of Androw Myllar, found in a liturgical work dated 1506. As the book, entitled *Expositio Sequentiarum*, was quite new to himself, and entirely unknown to bibliographers, M. Claudin deemed it worth while to insert fac-similes of both the device

and the colophon in the catalogue. This catalogue fortunately came into the hands of the late Dr. David Laing, who at once recognised the device as that used by Androw Myllar in the books printed by him and Chepman in 1508. Dr. Laing urged the authorities of the British Museum to endeavour to secure the Book of Sequences at the sale; and this they had the satisfaction of doing, although at a cost of forty pounds. This living, speaking witness is so interesting and important in the history of Androw Myllar, that we venture to consider such testimony cheaply purchased. The work in question does not indicate where it was printed, nor does it give the printer's name further than that of Androw Myllar on the sill of the device; but M. Claudin, after a comparison of types, discovered that the book was printed with the characters used by Laurence Hostingue, who exercised his art, along with Jamet Loys, in Rouen, at the date specified. Although it might be somewhat rash to conclude from the mere presence of the device that Myllar was the actual printer of the book, yet why this mark? Looking at it, however, in connection with what we do know of him in 1508, we feel less hesitation in attributing

the production of the work to him; but any doubt we might have on this point, and especially concerning the fact that Myllar was a thoroughly-trained practical printer, is at once set at rest by the conclusive evidence which we will immediately have the pleasure of making public for the first time. Before proceeding to the consideration of this, we cannot help noting the curious and interesting coincidence that the device of England's prototypographer should be first found in a liturgical work printed *for* him by William Maynyal at Paris in 1487; so that Caxton's hitherto undeciphered device, as well as Myllar's punning one, had a French origin; a conclusion which might easily be established regarding Myllar's, from the circumstance that it displays two small shields at the top corners, each charged with three *fleurs de lis*.

As soon as M. Claudin, who is of Scotch extraction, learned that Myllar was a Scotchman, he redoubled his efforts to obtain further information regarding him, and early in 1878 he was rewarded by discovering that Myllar was actually the printer of a book in 1505. One can imagine the feelings of such a thorough-paced bibliograph as M. Claudin when he stumbled upon a work which yielded

all the information he desired. Here is the title of the said volume, which had hitherto escaped the notice of every previous writer :— "Multorum vocabulorum equivocorum interpretatio, Magistri Johannis de Garlandia : grammatico & latini cupido per maxime necessaria Incipit." The work is a black-letter quarto of sixty-two folios, and bears this colophon :—"Libro qui vocorum quorundam vocabulorum secundum alphabeti : una cum interpretatione Anglie lingue : finis impositus est feliciter. quam Andreas Myllar scotus mira arte imprimi ac diligenti studio corrigi : orthographieque stilo prout facultas suppetebat : enucleatumque sollicitus fuit Anno christiane redemptionis Millesimo quingintesimo quinto." There is no place of printing noted, but we may safely assume that Rouen was the locality where the book had its birth, as it was the place where the unique example of this valuable work was discovered.

III.

MYLLAR A GENUINE PRACTICAL PRINTER.

THE new and important facts disclosed by the researches of M. Claudin supply us with ample proof that Androw Myllar was a trained printer, that his practical acquaintance with the typographic art was considerable, and that he was in every way qualified to undertake the management of a printing establishment on his own account. We must suppose that Chepman was quite aware of Myllar's qualifications, and would arrange to join him in establishing a printing-press in Edinburgh. It might even be that Myllar had gone abroad to make himself master of the art for the very purpose of returning to his native country and introducing it here. Chepman was undoubtedly alive to the usefulness of a local press, and

he took advantage of a combination of circumstances, which arose in 1507, to favour its establishment. Myllar was prepared, as far as experience went, and doubtless quite willing to assist in the erection of a press in Edinburgh. Chepman knew that Bishop Elphingstone had the *Breviary of Aberdeen* ready for the press, and that he would rather have it printed under his own immediate inspection; William Dunbar had plenty of poetry on hand, which he would have no objection to see in print, and the King himself was in every way favourable to the introduction of a press into his kingdom. It is a matter of small moment whether we allow that the King took the initiative in the matter, and that it was really "at his instance and request, and for his pleasure," that Chepman and Myllar undertook to establish a press in Edinburgh, or that he was prompted to the good purpose by the literary worthies above named. We may take it for granted that Chepman had made the King acquainted with the important fact that Androw Myllar was ready to come home and undertake the practical management of the printing-office, and that the opportunity was therefore at hand for the immediate introduction of the art. We are inclined to think that, but for

this preparedness on Myllar's part, the establishment of a printing-press in Edinburgh might have been indefinitely postponed. It is significant to note that in December, 1507, a few weeks after the King had granted the Privilege, Myllar was not in the country. We imagine that he was in Rouen, the school where his practical knowledge of printing had been acquired, providing himself with all the essentials which were necessary to enable him to make a start in Scotland. He would select one or two of his old shop-mates to accompany him—men experienced in the various branches of the typographic art, and to whom he would be able to converse freely in their native tongue.

Among the "stuff" belonging to the printing materials "brocht hame" by Myllar we must particularly notice the wood-cut device of Walter Chepman. It is French to the back-bone, and has the principal portions of it borrowed from the mark of Philippe Pigouchet, of Paris. The male and female figures are faithfully copied, even to the small crosses on their knees. The shield has the initials W C very elegantly interlaced in the style of the S V upon Simon Vostre's. But in Chepman's, the tree from which the shield depends is an oak bearing several

acorns, while in Pigouchet's it resembles a palm bearing a large globular fruit. Chepman's wants the ornamental border, and instead of the chaste letters composing the name of Philippe Pigouchet on the scroll, we have "Walterus chepman" in a somewhat heavy black letter.

Myllar's device may be described here. It is a trifle larger than Chepman's, and displays a windmill, with a miller ascending the outside ladder, carrying a sack of corn on his back. A shield, suspended from the stem of the mill, contains a monogram combining all the letters of Myllar's surname. In each of the upper corners of the device is a small shield, charged with three *fleurs de lis*, and in the compartment at the lower margin of the mark, is the name of the printer, "Androv myllar," in large Gothic characters.

Chepman's device is found in four of the first nine pieces in the interesting volume so often referred to, and Myllar's in seven. The text is printed with types which have a genuine Norman character, and were likely cut specially for the new Scottish press. The tenth piece is printed with the same characters as are found in many parts of the *Expositio Sequentiarum* of 1506. It wants

the beginning and the end, but may fairly be attributed to Myllar's foreign press. The eleventh piece, intitled "Here begynneth a gest of Robyn Hode," in which twelve leaves, not consecutive, are present, but the end wanting, is printed with a type identical with that occasionally used by Herman Bumgart, who exercised his art at Cologne about the end of the fifteenth century. What connection this piece has with the others we have not been able to make out. It is impossible to over-estimate the value of this volume, containing so many unique relics of our earliest press, since, but for its fortunate preservation, we would have had no proof that the printing-press had been in operation in Scotland so early as April, 1508, or any evidence that Walter Chepman and Androw Myllar had ever printed in company, or that Myllar ever printed in Scotland at all.

It is to be regretted that research has hitherto failed to discover any trace of Myllar after the date on which his name appears in the colophons of his own works (April, 1508). The veil of obscurity, therefore, enshrouds the last days of his life, and we are left to conjecture what we please respecting his fate. Of Chepman's future typographic career, we know that it was at his

command and expense that the two volumes of the *Aberdeen Breviary* were printed in 1509 and 1510. The title-pages and colophons distinctly tell us so, and refer to him in lofty terms; but it is extremely difficult to gather from them that *the honourable man, Walter Chepman, merchant in the city of Edinburgh*, was the actual printer of the work. His device occupies the last leaf of both volumes. Just before the first volume was completed, certain merchants in Edinburgh infringed some of the rights and privileges which the letters patent of 1507 secured to Chepman and Myllar. Chepman appealed to the Privy Council, by whom his complaint was duly considered, and decided in his favour. Neither in this complaint, nor in the pages of the *Breviary*, does Myllar's name appear, and it has consequently been assumed that he must have been dead at this time. We are loth, however, to drop acquaintance with Myllar so summarily, and we would fain believe that, although he does not figure in partnership with Chepman as printer of the *Breviary*, nor as a pursuer in the action noticed, he still continued to act as superintendent of the printing-house. Want of means may have prevented him sharing the expenses connected with the production

of the *Breviary*, but he may have been willing to continue his services as a paid workman, allowing Chepman to reap all the glory and all the profit arising from the publication of so important a work. Dr. David Laing, of most worthy memory, who did so much to throw light upon our early printers, and our early literature, proved that Chepman died in the end of the year 1528.

We have said enough, we think, to show that Androw Myllar was a trained practical printer, and that when he came to Edinburgh to establish its earliest press, he had several years of technical experience to aid him. Chepman, on the other hand, had had no opportunity of acquiring a practical knowledge of printing, and we believe that, when the Southgait press was put in operation, he was entirely ignorant of the details of the art. But he has undoubted claims to our regard, inasmuch as he was the monied partner in the concern, and supplied the capital, without which the enterprise could not have been carried on. He encouraged the art, like many generous spirits in the early days of printing, but, nevertheless, he was not a printer. He has no claim to be regarded as the "Scottish Caxton," and no title to

be ranked among the grand old masters of typography. Androw Myllar, however, stands in a different light, and we unhesitatingly proclaim him Scotland's First Printer.

We cannot close our remarks before offering a tribute of gratitude to M. Claudin, without whose labours we could not have succeeded in rescuing Androw Myllar from a long and undeserved neglect.

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